

Where does all that rain go?

Over an average year we get more than four feet of rain. Lucky for us it doesn't all come at once or we'd all be walking around on stilts.

Most of it comes in the summer — close to three feet of rain. In the winter there's a little more than a foot.

When the rain falls on the land, some of it runs off into bodies of water. These can be streams, canals, lakes, bays or wetlands. More about them later. The direction the water runs in depends on the slope of the land. If the land slopes toward the west, that's the way the water runs, and so on.

Even though our part of the state is pretty flat, there are still some slopes. They send the water on its way downhill. Here in South Florida, most of the water runs south, and east or west.

The areas that the water flows into are called drainage basins. One example of a drainage basin is the Caloosahatchee River Basin. Some of the water from Lake Okeechobee flows west into this river. More water from the land north and south of the river also drains into it. The area that drains into the Caloosahatchee is part of that river's drainage basin.

Because we are so flat, most of our drainage basins are pretty spread out. In fact, most of the area south of Lake Okeechobee is one big drainage basin. It includes the water conservation areas and the Everglades.

Lake Okeechobee is part way between the Gulf of Mexico and the Atlantic Ocean. The land slopes downwards from the lake towards the coasts. That's why water from the lake runs in three directions:

- West, towards the Gulf of Mexico, in the Caloosahatchee River;
- East, towards the Atlantic Ocean, in the St. Lucie River, and in canals;
- South, towards the Everglades, through a network of canals and marshlands.

This water network is known as the Kissimmee-Okeechobee-Everglades ecosystem.

